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THE NEW SPIRIT IN INDIA.

BY SIR HENRY COTTON, K.C.S.I., M.P.

THE test of a nation is that its members, among all kinds of partial differences, do, in the main, work together as fellow citizens, linked by common memories and associations and by common objects. Neither race nor language, nor religion, nor geographical boundary, nor subjection to a common government is sufficient in itself to constitute a nation. It is not every population which constitutes a nationality, and the nations of the world are populations united in a very special way and by very special forces. By this test let India be judged. It is a trite saying that there is no Indian Nation. But apply the touchstone, and it will be seen that that statement is no longer true, and that there is at the present moment a New India rising before our eyes, a nation in the real sense of actual formation, with common sentiments of interest and patriotism.

India is a vast assemblage of different races, divided into numberless castes, classes and creeds. The British Government is a supreme power separate and distinct from all the units which acknowledge its sway. Unsympathetic as the subject races may be among themselves—and my experience is that we grossly exaggerate their want of mutual sympathy—the British Government, as an alien Government, is more unsympathetic with all of them, and a probability, therefore, always exists that they will consent to merge their own minor differences and unite in their attitude towards the common head. An organization only is wanted around which the elements of a nationality may cluster.

The British Government has established the basis of such an organization. It has extended to India the inestimable boon of education. It has thrown open to the educated classes a literature every page of which breathes the praise of liberty and patriotism.

It is education on the lines of Western civilization which has served to unite the varying forces among the Indian populations.

The germ of a national organization on the basis of English education has long existed, but it has sprung into its present vigor in very recent times. Its present development is due to causes intended to produce a very different effect. The Anglo-Indian agitation, the protests which assert that "the only people who have any right to India are the British," the whole attitude of Englishmen in regard to Indian interests, the reactionary tendencies of bureaucratic rule, have combined to advance Indian unity. Clamor is met by clamor, and the very object is attained which the Anglo-Indian agitators, if they were wise in their generation, would spare no labor to prevent. The people of India have not been slow to follow the example set to them by Englishmen; they have learned their strength, the power of combination, the force of numbers, and there is now kindled in all the provinces of India a national movement which is destined to develop and increase, until it receives its fulfilment in the systematic regeneration of the whole country.

The outpouring of Indian aspirations and the yearning for nationality find their utterance through a newspaper press which has grown into an organ of great power, and are concentrated in the annual meetings of the Provincial and National Congresses.

The Indian National Congress is avowedly national in its name and scope. The Provincial Congresses which meet in every province for the discussion of provincial matters, unite together in a National Congress, which is annually held at a chosen centre, for the furtherance and discussion of national interests. A Congress consists of from five hundred to one thousand of the political leaders of all parts of India, comprising representatives of noble families, landowners, members of local Boards and municipalities, honorary magistrates, fellows of universities, and professional men, such as engineers, bankers, merchants, shopkeepers, journalists, lawyers, doctors, priests and college professors. The delegates are able to act in concert and to declare in no uncertain accents the common public opinion of the multitude of whom they are the mouthpiece. They are as representative in regard to religion as to rank and profession; Hindus, Parsis, Mohammedans and Christians have in turn presided.

Their deliberations are marked by acumen and moderation. The principal items of their propaganda constitute a practical programme displaying insight and sagacity, and covering most of the political and economic problems of the Indian Empire. I take it upon myself to say, as a watchful eye-witness from its birth, that the Indian National Congress has discharged its duties with exemplary judgment and moderation. If its deliberations have not in any considerable measure succeeded in moulding the policy of government, they have at least exercised an immense influence in developing the history and character of the Indian people.

New impulses are springing up on every side and striking the chord of national life. Public opinion in India is not blind to signs which all who run may read. Gleams of hope are reflected from the gradual solution of the Irish question and the oft-repeated acknowledgment that Ireland must be governed in accordance with the wishes of the people. The progress of freedom's battle in Russia is eagerly watched and noted. The Egyptian movement, with its strong national leanings, reacts on India. The Pan-Islamic agitation, the popular movement in Persia, and even so-called "Ethiopianism" in South Africa are not without their effect. The marked activity of Young China, the persistent agitation for restoration of sovereign rights, the abolition of privileges granted to foreigners under the Treaties, the determined attempt to obtain possession of important sources of revenue hitherto controlled by Europeans, the signs of what is undisguisedly a national and patriotic movement in that great Eastern country, are echoed with intelligent and sympathetic interest in India.

It does not fail to attract notice that while opinion in England is generally hostile to all national movement which may be deemed to affect its own interests—such as the agitation in China or Egypt or in South Africa, not to speak of Ireland—it is ardently sympathetic with the revolutionary and wholly national movements in Russia and Macedonia, and even in Persia, which do not conflict with British interests, and have been inspired by the principles of liberty-loving Englishmen and the example of England herself.

Above all, there is Japan. What line of thought does the renaissance in Japan suggest? An alien Government, however

well intentioned, cannot accomplish during many generations what National Government has done in less than forty years. Is not the tendency of an alien Government too often in the direction, not of progress, but of disruption and reaction? The conditions in India do not point to any early regeneration such as we have witnessed in Japan. But the example of Japan is not lost on India. It has roused new aspirations and a new hope; and a nascent nationalism is the magnet which holds together solvent influences let loose on a community which has hitherto never felt their sway.

There is now a party of Indian Nationalists who despair of constitutional agitation, and advocate the establishment of an absolutely free and independent form of national government. These men are the shadow of a cloud which casts itself over the future. A few years ago, there was no prospect of the rise of such a party. They are the product of a policy of reaction, which has led to discontent and unrest and impatience of the British connection with the country. The members of this party are in a minority at present. Their numbers are increasing, but they are not yet in the position of popular leaders.

The recognized leaders of Indian thought and the original pioneers of the national movement are still unaffected by these symptoms of alienation from the British Government. They are men of moderate views. Their ideal is not separation from Great Britain or independence from the general control, which they recognize must always be exercised over colonies and dependencies. They desire to obtain self-government and the detailed management of their own affairs. Their ideal is that India may ultimately be placed in a position corresponding to that of the self-governing colonies of the Empire. Their ideal is a federation of free and independent states, the United States of India, each with its own local autonomy under the supremacy of England. That is the goal which they see before them, knowing well that it can only be attained gradually and cautiously and as the result of time and experience.

There are now evidences of a change in the policy of the Indian Government. A Liberal Administration in England compels the adoption of Liberal and sympathetic principles in dealing with Indian questions on the spot. The leaders of Indian opinion possess much power and influence; and if the Government act

with them and through them and not against them, the disturbing tendencies of the extreme party will speedily subside. That changes must come no one can doubt, and the future of India's political progress depends on the tact and discretion which are exercised by the members of the Government of India in cooperating with public opinion in measures of reform.

There can be no danger in this course. English rule in its present form cannot continue. But the leaders of the national movement assume, and assume rightly, that the connection between India and England will not be snapped. The English language, while it is the means of enabling the different populations of India to attain unity, binds them also to Great Britain. It is from England that all the ideas of Western thought which are revolutionizing the country have sprung; the language of Shakespeare and Milton has become the common language of India; the future of India is linked with that of England, and it is to England that India must always look for guidance, assistance and protection in her need.

HENRY COTTON.